

## **Rock Hill School Makes Healthy Changes Thanks to Color Me Healthy Program**

### ***Issue***

Linda Hutchinson and Sylvia Echols, co-principals at Central Child Development Center (CCDC) in Rock Hill, knew when several overweight children enrolled at the center serving 340 children in pre-kindergarten and special needs classes, that they needed to change the school's nutrition and physical activity climate. With limited snack budgets, teachers were buying inexpensive high-fat, high-calorie foods, and birthday celebrations were often filled with cupcakes and brownies. The principals felt that improved nutrition and physical activity would increase the children's chances of succeeding in school.

In South Carolina 25 percent of low-income children between the ages of 2 and 5 years old are overweight or at risk of overweight, according to S.C. Coalition for Obesity Prevention. Type 2 diabetes, previously considered an adult disease, has increased dramatically in overweight children. One result: the state's obesity-related medical costs topped \$1 billion in 2003.

### ***Intervention***

The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC), through monies provided by the Preventive Health Services Block Grant, implemented an initiative called Color Me Healthy at the Central Child Development Center to help turn alarming childhood obesity statistics around. Color Me Healthy is a curriculum that teaches children and parents the importance of healthy eating habits and physical activity. Designed for 4 and 5 year olds, it engages children through lively, interactive classroom lessons.

Teacher trainings, led by DHEC Region 3 staff, also provided professional development to help facilitate change in behavior, spark positive role modeling and inspire environmental change in the classroom. Other elements of the program at Central Child Development Center include:

- Field trips to local farms and grocery stores, where children learn about selecting healthful snacks and meal ingredients;
- "KinderGardeners," a gardening project where children plant, tend and harvest a variety of veggies and eat their first salads;
- A annual school-wide parade where teachers dress up as fruits and veggies; and
- A school-wide picnic each year at a local community park, which introduces many families to the park system in Rock Hill.

### ***Impact***

In 2005, 23 teachers and the two co-principals at Central Child Development Center were trained in the Color Me Healthy curriculum. Other results include:

- All 11 classrooms are now using the Color Me Healthy Curriculum;
- The center received additional funds from Rock Hill Schools to provide nutritious snacks such as low fat cheeses, milk, yogurt, vegetables, and fruit ;
- Staff members now eat healthier lunches;
- "KinderGardeners," has now expanded to three areas of the playground, and CCDC partners with Rebound, Rock Hill School District Three's alternative school on the project; and
- There is an increased emphasis on outdoor play.

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